

City Of Saint Paul Budget Documents: General Description

The mayor must propose to the city council by August 15 of each year a complete financial plan for the next calendar year. After considering the mayor's recommendations, the city council must adopt the annual budget by December 20. The annual financial plan for the City of Saint Paul is composed of spending, financing and performance plans for three types of budgets: operating, debt service and capital improvements.

Operating Budget: The annual operating budget is a twelve-month financial plan that provides for the delivery of city services; support and planning for service delivery; routine maintenance; minor remodeling and repairs of existing structures; acquisition of vehicles, mobile, mechanical and office equipment; and other items having an estimated useful life of less than three years. The primary financing sources for the operating budget are property taxes, state aids, dedicated revenues, user charges, and grants.

The operating budget accounts for financial resources through various funds. The general fund, which is the largest of the city's operating funds, supports basic city services such as public safety and recreation. Other operating funds, commonly referred to as special funds, include internal service funds, enterprise funds, special assessment funds, special revenue funds and trust and agency funds, and support services that generally are financed by non-property tax revenues. For the majority of city funds, the modified accrual basis of accounting is used to budget and account for financial resources. Under this method, expenditures generally are recognized when incurred and revenues are recognized when they become both measurable and available. Internal service and enterprise funds use the accrual basis of accounting, however, where expenses are recognized when incurred and revenues are recognized when earned.

Debt Service Budget: The annual debt service budget provides for the payment of interest and principal on short and long term general obligation debt. It also includes reserves for a part of the following year's debt service. Primary financing sources for debt service budgets are property taxes, transfers from other funds, interest earnings, and dedicated revenues such as tax increments, special assessments to benefitted properties, and utility user fees. Debt service for revenue bonds is usually budgeted in a special fund budget.

Capital Improvement Budget: The annual capital improvement budget includes appropriations for all projects having an estimated useful life in excess of three years (other than the acquisition of office or mechanical equipment, or

minor remodeling or repairs of existing structures). Projects are financed with general obligation or revenue bonds, aids, grants, and special revenues received by the city for capital improvements, and all monies appropriated in the general fund and special fund budgets for capital projects. The capital improvement budget does not finance vehicles or mobile equipment.

Although the capital improvement budget is adopted annually, project selection and prioritization occurs on a biennial basis. A special citizen committee reviews project proposals submitted by civic organizations, neighborhood groups and city departments, and then develops project recommendations that serve at the basis for the mayor's proposed capital budget. When the biennial budget is adopted by the city, the first year becomes law, while the second year serves as a guide for the following year's appropriations. The capital improvement budget is also part of a ten-year program developed by the city's planning commission to plan for the physical development or redevelopment of city-owned land, buildings, and other improvements, as well as to induce the private development of housing and business facilities. Budget appropriations are multi-year in nature and remain until a project is either completed or canceled.

Budget Structure

Budgets are requested and approved at the activity level. Activities are aggregated into divisions in the general and special operating funds. Funds and divisions are then aggregated into departments or offices. Departments manage operating (general fund and special funds) budgets, debt service budgets, and capital improvement budgets. Overall management of the general operating fund is the responsibility of the director of the office of financial services.